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ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in Yugoslavia begins with an overview of the role of English in the society in general and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels. The review also covers the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, creative writing, language research, and other sources of information. It is concluded that while English is not used for instruction or communication within the country, it is considered the most important language of international communication for politics and trade, technology and the sciences, humanities, tourism, and entertainment. Although in general, literature teaching is highly traditional, there is interest in making the syllabus more relevant and introducing more contemporary literature. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Yugoslavia

Date: July 1985

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

Yugoslavia is a federation of six republics: SR Serbia, SR Croatia, SR Slovenia, SR Macedonia, SR Bosnia-Herzegovina, SR Montenegro; and two autonomous provinces: AP Vojvodina and AP Kosovo. There is considerable variety of language and educational policy. Serbo-Croatian is the national language, but Macedonian, Slovene, Hungarian and Albanian have official status. Russian was the most widely taught foreign language after the war, and still retains a narrow lead over English in elementary education. French is the most popular foreign language in Macedonia, and German is important in Slovenia owing to the closeness of Austria. Italian is taught in some schools in Croatia.

English is not used for instruction or communication within the country. It is now considered to be the most important language of international communication for politics and trade, technology and the sciences, the humanities and tourism, and entertainment. With regard to the last of these, the victory of a Yugoslav film at the 1985 Cannes Film Festival should stimulate the demand for translators.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education is fully decentralized. The foundations of the education system are laid down within the republics and provinces and elaborated on self-management principles at local level and in the schools, which are independent and self-

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managing. Each republic and province independently establishes policy, passes laws on education and financing and adopts curricula. Self-managing 'communities of interest' play an important role. Schools and other educational institutions enjoy a high degree of autonomy. All schools and educational institutions are public and the whole system of education and training is a component part of the socialist self-management system.

Only matters of general policy are dictated by the Federal Authorities, each republic and province then implements this policy in its own way and at its own pace. In 1984 this included the directive to establish a common core syllabus for elementary education.

There are many similarities between Yugoslavia and Britain in the way education is provided, and in both cases the result is much more coherent and uniform than one would expect from such decentralized administration.

Elementary schools - ages 7 to 15

Elementary education is compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 15, and is provided in a single type of eight-year school for general education.

Foreign languages generally are introduced in the fifth year at age 11. In theory pupils can choose among the four languages, English, Russian, German and French, but hardly any schools can offer the whole range. Two or three periods a week are allocated to the foreign language.

In Belgrade, foreign language is compulsory from the third grade (age 9) with a second foreign language being introduced from the fifth grade (age 11, the year when in other elementary schools the first foreign language is begun). This was introduced experimentally in 1978 (then tried out at the second grade) and established in 1980.

A few schools in Belgrade and a few experimental schools elsewhere have introduced foreign languages into the first-year curriculum, with six 45-minute periods a week. Parents are in favour of this, and competition to enrol is keen. Classes for young children are also offered by the independently-run foreign language institutes; enrolment for these is in the thousands, even though fees are charged. The demand for English in such classes virtually eclipses the other languages.

The educational authorities have tried over the years to establish and maintain parity in the learning of the four main foreign languages, but with little success. Although Russian still leads, English is gaining ground and parents and students consider English to be the language of most use to them. The imbalance was particularly noticeable in Croatia where figures released in 1978 showed English accounting for 63% of pupils, German 33% and French and Russian only 2% each. This led to the passing of a 'quota' law that each language should account for not more than 40% and not less than 15% of pupils, regardless of the wishes and pressures of parents and students. The 1985 aggregated figures for the whole country show that these percentages are roughly adhered to:

English	33%
Russian	33%
German	18%
French	16%

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However, there are still great imbalances within particular republics and provinces. In particular, virtually no German is taught in Macedonia and Kosovo, and Slovenia has just enacted a policy of not teaching French or Russian in elementary schools. The distribution of foreign languages in Slovenian elementary schools is 75% English and 25% German.

All this applies to the selection of the first foreign language. There are no quotas for the second foreign language but English seems to be preferred by those not already studying it.

Secondary schools - ages 15 to 19

In the late 1970s a major reform of secondary education led to the virtual disappearance of separate academic 'gimnazija' alongside specialized trade and technical schools. Students in the first two years of the secondary stage now follow a common core syllabus, effectively continuing the elementary cycle. All students have to take 'technical' subjects such as carpentry, and various general and polytechnical subjects have been incorporated into the syllabus to counter objections that the previous syllabus was elitist, socially divisive, and failed to inculcate a positive attitude towards work or to train students for self-management. All this has made a reallocation of time necessary, and it is generally felt that foreign languages have lost ground in favour of technical and other subjects.

The major part of the reform affects the last two years of the secondary stage - 'usemreno obrazovanje' which literally means 'directed education' but which has come to be widely known as 'vocationalization'. In this phase, education will be essentially vocational, though some elements of general curricula will be included. At present the third- and fourth-year programmes are conducted in the same schools as the first two years, but the intention is that eventually students will follow their vocational courses in specialized Centres of Learning, of which some already exist in Croatia and Vojvodina. There have also been misgivings about the reforms, and there is now some deliberate slowing down of the pace of change, particularly in Croatia and Slovenia, to permit discussion and further reform.

Since all education in the last phase is to be directed towards a trade or profession (of which some 600 are listed, grouped into twenty categories) general English courses will cease for the student at the age of 17 (i.e. after six years of learning), and for the final two years only ESP courses will be available.

Within the four-year programme, continuous assessment is generally practised rather than end-of-year examinations. At the age of 19 students take a final examination, qualifying successful candidates to enter their chosen field at level 3 or 4 (medium complex work) on a national scale of eight levels ranging from 1 (unskilled) to 8 (doctoral status). At present, English is offered in librarianship, journalism, translation, and tourism.

To make room for courses judged essential to carry out the aims of the reform, foreign language periods have been reduced from three to two 45-minute periods a week, although those students choosing to be translators may have six to twelve periods a week. It should be noted that even at university level translation is not a university course. Students who choose it will work in banks and business enterprises, translating correspondence and reports.

The ELT programme of the secondary school has swung away from grammar translation methods, and there is now an emphasis on communicative goals and student-centred learning. These new approaches are a major topic of seminars held regularly for English teachers in most republics.

Higher education

There are English departments in the universities of Belgrade, Nis, Novi Sad, Pristina, Zagreb, Osijek, Zadar, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, and Skopje. There is a department offering service English only in Titograd, and there are plans to amalgamate this with the teacher training college at Niksic to create a full English department in Montenegro, the only republic which does not have one.

The universities, although autonomous, have also had to undergo reform and accept some core subjects in the first two years in addition to the specialized departmental work.

All candidates must have completed secondary school and all universities have a qualifying examination, except in Croatia where a candidate who has successfully completed secondary school and has a contract from an employer guaranteeing work on completion of studies is admitted automatically.

The course for level 2 (the Diploma, equivalent to BA) lasts four years, and the third and fourth years are now vocational. The options offered in English are translation, librarianship, teaching, journalism and literature. One effect of vocationalization has been to restrict the methodology element in the course (always a very small component) to the teaching stream.

English courses in all the universities are largely traditional and literary, though linguistics is gaining time and status; it amounts, together with language practice, to nearly half the course in several universities. Few universities have an explicit syllabus, merely a catalogue of compulsory and optional courses, the content of which reflects the background of the staff. There is a growing interest in reform of syllabuses and planned objectives, and this is likely to dominate discussions over the next few years.

Postgraduate work is undertaken in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Novi Sad, and Sarajevo.

Examinations are held four or five times a year, and are both written and oral. Students can repeat examinations more or less indefinitely (regulations vary but are relatively liberal). Student numbers are high in the first year but many students drop out after the first-year examinations. However, some keep returning in the hope of passing. This is a reflection of the reduced employment prospects which have overtaken the country in the last five years.

The post of head of department is usually a rotating one, with tenure lasting only two years. Although the head has important administrative functions, most important decisions are taken by committees.

Students of other subjects are often offered service courses in English, taught either by the English department of the university or by special units within other departments. Such courses are rarely compulsory or evaluated as part of the degree, and so tend not to be well supported.

Recently very large numbers of foreign students have enrolled, especially Greek students coming to Macedonia and Serbia. They are welcomed since they pay fees in hard currency. Many of them opt for English courses.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

All teachers in the schools are Yugoslav nationals. The universities employ a few foreign lectors of relatively junior status on yearly contracts. The only native speakers of English who teach in Yugoslavia are those who have taken Yugoslav nationality or acquired residential status, usually through marriage.

The majority of English teachers are recruited from the university English departments, where they will have had a small component of methodology in their last two years. In addition there are several teacher training colleges, now absorbed within the administrative structures of universities but functioning independently. These tend to provide the first two years of a degree programme, but include transfer to a parent university to complete their degrees. The others, however, are qualified to teach at primary level only. The long-term aim is to have a profession consisting only of graduates.

The general standard of English among teachers is high, rarely lower than Band 6 on the ELTS bands, and interest and morale are also high. Practical methodological training, not yet fully met by the universities at the pre-service stage, is supplied by summer and winter in-service seminars which all teachers should be able to attend at least once in three years and many teachers attend more frequently. These seminars are supported most vigorously in Croatia, Servia, and Slovenia.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

Foreign textbooks have effectively disappeared from schools and bookshops as a result of the currency crisis of the last few years. This has affected particularly the universities and the foreign language institutes, who now rely more heavily on library stock, foreign presentations, and photocopying. At lower levels, where student numbers are highest, materials have been written and published locally. This has been a stimulus to local creativity, though the quality, particularly of print and illustration, is variable.

School textbooks have always been locally produced, and the standard is generally high. In response to recent educational reform, new textbooks have been produced which compete for adoption in the various republics and provinces. They usually claim to be based on a communicative syllabus, but remain largely structural in character. In Croatia in particular some ESP texts have been published to fit the vocational syllabuses. Many of these are specialized only in the choice of reading texts, but an initiative was taken in February 1985 by the major Croatian educational publisher, Skolska Knjiga, to train some of its potential authors in ESP material production.

In several republics there are organizations supplying schools with audio materials and visual aids. These are usually cheap, but the quality is variable. The recent surge of interest in computers has not by-passed the teachers of English. Most schools now have at least one computer, either Sinclair Spectrum, Commodore 64, or one of several local makes. In Serbia and Slovenia there are committees of English teachers working on selecting, adapting, and writing ELT software.

See also Section 7 below for contributions made by centres and institutes of foreign languages.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

The principal contribution is made by the foreign language advisers, who are experienced teachers transferred to the Zavods, which may be loosely considered part of the Ministry of Education in each republic. Among their duties are:

the organization of in-service training
visiting schools and advising teachers
implementation of the principles of the reform
proposing texts for supplementary use in schools
representing foreign languages at curriculum meetings

Each adviser is responsible for both primary and secondary education. In some republics, e.g. Bosnia-Herzegovina, one adviser is responsible for all four languages offered. In others, e.g. the Croatian regional Zavods, there is an adviser for each language.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

This is largely decentralized. See Sections 1 and 2.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Many organizations active in the field of 'adult education' in big and medium-sized towns offer either solely language courses or language as one component of a range of courses. They are variously called centres or institutes for foreign languages, or workers' or people's universities. They are independent bodies, publicly owned but self-managed and fee funded.

Enrolment for English classes is high, often running into several thousands in a single institution. The English proficiency of the teachers is generally higher than that of schoolteachers, since the salaries and conditions are on the whole better. Staff from these institutes participate in seminars for schoolteachers. It used to be customary to send staff regularly to Britain for summer schools, but this has become almost impossible in the last five years.

Most of the textbooks are written locally, but British textbooks have been used and still are where sets have been preserved. Several institutes have their own publication department and pay staff to write either for internal use or for schools. All of them test for language proficiency and issue certificates. A few have offered classes for vocational groups, such as doctors or engineers, or special interest groups, such as drama classes.

One of the basic tenets of the Yugoslav educational system is that education is a lifelong process. Great stress is laid on this, and the reform provides for re-entry into the system to obtain additional qualifications. The importance of the adult education sector is likely to increase as a result of this.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Almost all support for teaching English is covered by the Programme of Cultural, Educational, and Scientific Exchanges, which is re-negotiated every two years. The British Council, like all other foreign cultural agencies in Yugoslavia, undertakes no direct teaching or examining, but an English Language Officer in Belgrade and an ELT qualified officer in Zagreb support work in schools and universities in the following ways:

Lectors

The British Council supports lectors at the universities of Belgrade, Nis, Novi Sad, Pristina, Skopje, Sarajevo, Zagreb (2), and Ljubljana (2). There is also a lector at the Higher Economic and Business School in Maribor, and at the Teacher Training College at Prizren. In addition, the British Council recruits and supports the post of Consultant Teacher at the Resource Centre established in the Foreign Language School in Zagreb, which combines in-service training with materials development.

Academic links

There are many established links between British and Yugoslav universities under the Academic Travel Grant of which two, those between Sheffield and Osijek and between Sarajevo and Lancaster, are in the field of English.

Summer schools

The British Council offers thirty subsidized places on summer schools in Britain to schoolteachers nominated by the Zavods every year. Up to four more are usually supported from centres and institutes of foreign languages. A further thirty unsubsidized places are available, but in recent years few of these have been taken up.

Scholarships and visitorships

Of the five- and ten-month scholarships awarded by the British Council each year, at least one and often several are awarded for advanced study in linguistics or ELT methodology. Fifteen to twenty teachers and advisers go to Britain every year as subsidized visitors. This includes a group attending the IATEFL conference, which has attracted Yugoslav teachers for many years, an interest fostered by the former chairman, Dr W. R. Lee.

Specialist visitors to Yugoslavia

Two or three tours are carried out every year by prominent British specialists in ELT or allied fields or in literature.

English Teaching Theatre

Since 1981 the English Teaching Theatre has made three highly successful tours of Yugoslavia, playing in about twelve centres each time, and it is hoped to make this a bi-annual event.

Short courses (seminars) in Yugoslavia

Between twelve and eighteen of these are held every year, staffed by British and American lecturers. British Council ELT staff and recruited lectors also participate. Enrolment on the Belgrade winter seminar can be as high as 150, but the norm is closer to 50. One seminar held every year in Croatia is

designated as the Federal Seminar; this usually addresses a more specialized and advanced topic and is intended for potential advisers and textbook writers as well as experienced teachers. The British Council also organizes and finds staff for other short courses, such as that held each year in Kragujevac for lecturers in technical and scientific departments, and seminars for the centres and institutes of foreign languages in Zagreb and Belgrade.

Lectors' conference

Every year in December there is a conference hosted by one of the universities to which all university lectors, Yugoslav and foreign, together with staff of centres and institutes of foreign languages are invited. These began modestly ten years ago as informal meetings, but are now well planned four-day events with constructive working sessions. Although these are jointly organized by the Yugoslav, British and American sides, the academic input tends to come from the the British Council ELT staff and lectors.

Yugoslav ELT review

This is a twice yearly collection of papers, edited by a British lector, typed in the British Council, duplicated by the American Embassy, and distributed free through university departments and centres and institutes of foreign languages. It is hoped that this will eventually become a Yugoslav publication, since there is no other journal for English teachers and foreign journals are rarely seen.

ELT by radio and television

In 1983 the British Council arranged for RTV Belgrade to buy the first thirty episodes of the BBC course Follow Me, which have now been transmitted in all republics and provinces. They are shown together with a twelve-minute locally made follow-up programme providing some additional examples and explanations in Serbo-Croatian. The supplementary programmes have been made with native speakers, including British Council staff and children from the Belgrade International School. The British Council is acknowledged in the credits. RTV Belgrade has now bought the remaining thirty episodes, and more supplementary programmes are being recorded.

Books

The British Council library in Belgrade maintains a special ELT room with a good collection of textbooks, audio-visual materials, and linguistics and methodology texts, in the charge of an assistant librarian who deals with teachers' enquiries or can pass them to the English Language Officer. During the winter a series of teachers' evenings is held at the library, featuring talks and workshops, playreadings, and films. A similar programme is run in Zagreb, which also has an ELT lending library and a collection of support material. Presentations of books are made during the year to university departments and to individual participants on in-service seminars. An exhibition of recently published ELT books is taken to most seminars. ELT usually features prominently at the British Council stand at the Belgrade Book Fair, though rather few individual British publishers exhibit there nowadays. Oxford University Press has an arrangement with a Slovenian publisher to print and market dictionaries locally, but this is the only licensing arrangement in force at the moment.

9. American support for the teaching of English

There is no resident American English teaching officer, although Yugoslavia is covered by the American English teaching officer in Poland who usually visits at the time of the lectors' conference (see above). There is a Fullbright officer with pastoral responsibility for Fullbright fellows and junior Fullbright lectors, of whom there are about twenty at various universities and teacher training colleges. The American input to seminars and administration of touring US specialists falls to a Yugoslav employee of the US Embassy.

There is considerable Anglo-American co-operation over seminars and the annual lectors' conference. Relations are close and mutually beneficial. Although there are more Fullbright lectors than British Council lectors, the British tend to remain in Yugoslavia for longer (the Fullbright limit is two years).

10. Other agency support

Nil.

11. Commercial opportunities

With the foreign currency shortage that has existed since the late seventies, there are few obvious opportunities for promoting British educational products commercially. Very few Yugoslavs can afford to visit Britain regularly, let alone pay the fees of private language schools. (Many of the schools, however, have been generous in offering free tuition and fully paid scholarships to Yugoslavs.) Apart from Oxford University Press (see Section 8), there have been no joint ventures in publishing or in teaching. In view of legal and economic constraints, it is joint ventures rather than more conventional forms of trade that offer the only opportunities at present.

12. Creative writing

Yugoslavs are voracious readers, and there is a thriving literary community which regularly seeks international contacts through events such as the Struga poetry festival and the Belgrade meeting of writers. British writers are regularly invited to these events. The poet Richard Burns, with the collaboration of the Centre for Foreign Languages in Belgrade, has been conducting poetry workshops with children in towns all over Serbia. British authors are translated into Serbo-Croatian. Copyright in print materials is adequately protected and royalties are paid. Video and software, however, are not covered by the same law, and there is vigorous public debate over these matters. Foreign books and films are subject to censorship, but this seems to be conducted benignly and sensibly.

13. Current research

The research conducted by university departments tends to reflect the interests of individual professors. Much of it is in the field of literature, often investigating links between British and Yugoslav writers. Some linguistic research is given an 'applied' flavour, but there is little direct research into classroom methods. Interesting lexicographical projects are emerging in Pristina and Novi Sad.

14. Bibliography

Little has been written in this area but the Council's Programme of Cultural Educational and Scientific Exchanges between Britain and Yugoslavia, 1984/5, is worth reading.

15. General statement

Although, in general, literature teaching is highly traditional, there is interest in making the syllabus more relevant and introducing more contemporary literature. This and other issues in curriculum reform promise to dominate discussion over the next few years.